

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

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TAGS: PFOR MO
SUBJECT: VISIT OF TWELVE AMERICAN JEWISH EDITORS TO MOROCCO

1. BEGIN UNCLASSIFIED. SUMMARY: TWELVE AMERICAN EDITORS OF JEWISH WEEKLY NEWSPAPERS TOURED MOROCCO DECEMBER 14-22 AT INVITATION OF MINISTRY OF TOURISM. GROUP VISITED IMPORTANT SITES IN HISTORY OF MOROCCAN JUDAISM, MET WITH PRIME MINISTER AND LEADERS OF MOROCCAN JEWISH COMMUNITY, AND RECEIVED BRIEFING FROM AMBASSADOR. TOUR WAS PRECEDED BY HIGHLY PUBLICIZED VISIT BY FOUR AMERICAN RABBIS IN MAY 1976 AND IS TO BE FOLLOWED BY OTHER TOURS, ORGANIZED AND CONDUCTED AT MOROCCAN INITIATIVES AND AIMED AT INCREASE OF MUTUAL COMPREHENSION BETWEEN MOROCCO AND AMERICAN JEWISH COMMUNITY. VISITS ALSO HAVE OBVIOUS AIM OF ENHANCING STATURE OF MOROCCO AND ITS KING AS TRUSTED INTERMEDIARY IN LARGER MIDDLE EAST CONTEXT. END SUMMARY.

2. TWELVE AMERICAN EDITORS OF AMERICAN JEWISH WEEKLIES FROM JERSEY CITY TO SAN FRANCISCO SPENT EIGHT DAYS IN MOROCCO DEC. 14-22 AS GUESTS OF NATIONAL TOURISM OFFICE. GROUP WAS ESCORTED BY RABBI BARUCH HELMAN OF BOSTON UNIVERSITY, A SCHOLAR OF NORTH AFRICAN AND ORIENTAL JEWISH HISTORY WHO WAS INSTRUMENTAL IN SETTING UP VISIT OF FOUR AMERICAN RABBIS TO MOROCCO IN 1976 (76 RABAT 2647), AND MR. GHALI BENSOUDE OF THE CHICAGO OFFICE OF THE MOROCCAN TOURISM OFFICE. VISIT ATTRACTED CONSIDERABLE INTEREST ON PART OF MOROCCAN
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MEDIA; NEWSPAPER ARTICLES APPEARED ALMOST DAILY BEFORE, DURING AND AFTER THEIR STAY, INCLUDING A FRONT-PAGE PHOTO OF THEIR MEETING WITH PRIME MINISTER OSMAN ON DEC. 19.

3. TOUR IS PART OF CONTINUING EFFORT BY MOROCCO TO PUBLICIZE LONG HISTORY OF PROTECTION OF ITS JEWISH COMMUNITY AND TO ENCOURAGE MUTUAL COMPREHENSION AND TOURISM ON PART OF AMERICAN JEWS.

FIRST SUCH GESTURE WAS VISIT OF RABBIS IN MAY 1976; A SECOND GROUP OF TWELVE JEWISH JOURNALISTS IS SCHEDULED TO TOUR THE COUNTRY IN SPRING 1978.

4. TRIP TOOK GROUP TO MARRAKECH, CASABLANCA, RABAT, MEKNES, FES, TETOUAN AND TANGIER. IN ALL CITIES, THE EDITORS WERE ENTERTAINED BY MEMBERS OF RESIDENT JEWISH COMMUNITY, AND VISITED ANCIENT SYNAGOGUES AND OTHER SITES CONNECTED WITH JEWISH HISTORY. IN RABAT, THEY ADDITIONALLY HAD OPEN AND FRANK DISCUSSIONS WITH THE PRIME MINISTER AND WIDE RANGING BRIEFING BY THE AMBASSADOR. OTHER HIGH OFFICIALS WHO RECEIVED THEM INCLUDED THE MINISTER OF TOURISM AND THE DIRECTOR OF THE MAJOR PRO-GOVERNMENT NEWSPAPER GROUP. THEY ALSO LAID TRADITIONAL WREATH AT MAUSOLEUM OF LATE KING MOHAMMED V.

IN TANGIER, A BRIEF BUT MUCH-APPRECIATED VISIT TO THE OLD AMERICAN LEGATION WAS SET UP BY THE CONSUL GENERAL. END UNCLASSIFIED.

5. BEGIN LIMITED OFFICIAL USE. COMMENT: OVERALL EFFECT OF VISIT WAS HIGHLY POSITIVE, BOTH FOR PARTICIPANTS AND FOR MOROCCAN THEY MET. VISITORS REPORTED AMAZEMENT AT THE DYNAMISM OF THE MOROCCAN JEWISH COMMUNITY AND AT THE ABSOLUTE ABSENCE OF ANY COMPLAINTS OF DISCRIMINATION OR EXCLUSION FROM MOROCCAN LIFE. THEY WERE DISTURBED, HOWEVER, AT THE MASSIVE EXODUS OF MOROCCAN JEWS TO FRANCE, ISRAEL, THE U.S. AND CANADA OVER THE PAST THIRTY YEARS; BUT ON THE BASIS OF THEIR CONVERSATIONS, THEY ASCRIBED RECENT EMIGRATION PRINCIPALLY TO LACK OF FINANCIAL INCENTIVES IN MOROCCO UNCONNECTED LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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WITH RELIGION, AND TO SOCIAL PRESSURES WITHIN THE JEWISH COMMUNITY ITSELF. THE VISITORS WERE STRUCK BY THE SYMBOLISM OF A STOP AT AN ABANDONED SYNAGOGUE IN FES, DESCRIBED AS A JEWEL OF MOORISH ARCHITECTURE BUT COBWEB-FILLED AND CRUMBLING.

6. THE TRIP DID NOT PASS WITHOUT SOME STRAIN. SPECIFIC COMPLAINTS WERE OVER-PROGRAMMING, WITH FAR TOO LITTLE TIME SET ASIDE FOR SHOPPING AND SIMPLE RECUPERATION, AND LACK OF BASIC PUBLIC RELATIONS SENSITIVITY BY THE MOROCCANS, AS EVINCED BY ABSENCE OF BRIEFING MATERIAL ON THE PLACES VISITED, OCCASIONAL FAILURE OF GUIDES TO SHOW UP ON SCHEDULE, AND LACK OF A MICROPHONE IN THE BUS PROVIDED BY THE TOURISM OFFICE. THESE WERE DISMISSED AS MINOR ANNOYANCES WHICH COULD BE CORRECTED ON THE NEXT VISIT.

7. ON SUBSTANTIVE SIDE, ESCORT RABBI HELMAN WAS CONCERNED THAT ONE QUESTION FROM THE GIVE-AND-TAKE SESSION WITH THE PRIME MINISTER MIGHT HAVE UNFORTUNATE REPERCUSSIONS. RESPONDING TO A QUERY AS TO WHETHER MOROCCO WAS READY TO ACCEPT ISRAELI VISITORS AND TOURISTS TRAVELLING ON ISRAELI PASSPORTS, THE PM REPLIED AFFIRMATIVELY. IN CONTEXT, HOWEVER, IT WAS CLEAR HE MEANT THAT THIS MIGHT DEVELOP OVER A PERIOD OF TIME AND THAT ARRANGEMENTS REMAINED TO BE DEVISED. HELAM FELT THAT AS THIS WAS THE PRINCIPAL "HARD NEWS" DEVELOPED

ON THE TOUR, IT MIGHT UNDULY RAISE EXPECTATIONS. HE STATED THAT HE HIMSELF KNEW AN ISRAELI AGENCY WHICH WAS READY TO BRING FITEEN THOUSAND TOURISTS TO MOROCCO AS SOON AS THE GATES WERE OPENED.

8. ON BALANCE, THIS VISIT, COMING AT A TIME WHEN SADAT'S PEACE INITIATIVES HAVE BROKEN DOWN STEROTYPES AND OPENED A NEW DIALOGUE, MAY WELL BE SYMPTOMATIC THAT ATTITUDES IN THE MODERATE ARAB STATES ARE UNDERGOING SOME RAPID CHANGES. END LIMITED OFFICIAL USE. ANDERSON

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Decaption Date: 01-Jan-1960 12:00:00 am
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Disposition Approved on Date:
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